a) The Priesthood.

The Thongas have no sacerdotal caste, but, as has already been pointed out, the right of officiating in religious ceremonies is strictly confined to *the eldest brother*. All offerings must be made through him. To supplant him is a great taboo, and would entail the malediction of the gods, and even the death of the offender. There are, however, some minor offerings which anyone is allowed to make to his gods ; for instance, a lover who has been jilted, may, after having consulted the bones, give something to his god in order to obtain his aid in regaining the favour of the girl he loves. But, as a rule, no one must *hahla*, or even *gandjela*, before the death of his parents. If, after their death, their son should happen to dream of them, he must offer worship to the deceased by pouring some ground tobacco on to his wooden pillow, this being the commencement of his religious functions : "he begins to learn to gandjela" (Rangane), and, if he is the eldest, he may in course of time become the priest of the whole family. I heard, however, a man from Tembe assert that he had *hahla* when his father was still living, but in this case he had been designated by the bones. A little child may even perform the office if the bones order it ; his father will then hold him in his arms and pray in his stead. The bones often call on *women* to pronounce the prayer, especially the elder sister ; there is no anti-feminism in Thonga religion. In the *luma* ceremony, however, it must always be a man, the chief himself, who is the principal officiant. The wives of the clansmen naturally cannot take a prominent part in the offerings made for the clan, being themselves members of another clan and having their own ancestor-gods, to

(I. p. 268), offerings being frequently made to the gods of the mother's family through the agency of the maternal uncle. Hence the fact that uterine nephews take such a peculiar part in the ritual of the worship.

I must add that according to information just received from the Rev. A. Jaques, in the Northern clans uterine nephews do not steal the portion of the offerings put apart for the ancestor-gods. It seems that this custom, which I believe to be ancient, is met with essentially amongst the Ronga clans, where the special term *mupsyana* (an old Bantu word corresponding to *um-tshana* in Xosa and *mochana* in Sutho) has also been preserved to designate the uterine nephew, whilst it has fallen into disuse in the Northern clans. (Compare I. p. 162, 232, 498.)

782 whom they sometimes pray in the hut (See App. IV). Amongst
593 Thongas the wife does not adopt the gods of her husband's
793 family (1).

The beginnings of the *constitution of a sacerdotal caste* may be seen in the fact that in each clan, the mhamba, the sacred object used by the royal family to invoke its gods, or the drug on which national invulnerability depends, is entrusted to the care of a certain man, whose office is hereditary. As soon as the political tie becomes stronger, and the power of the paramount chief greater, the religious acts which are performed at the capital gain in importance, and the person who officiates becomes a kind of high priest. Should this evolution continue, it is easy to see how a sacerdotal class may be formed at the expense of the primitive family worship, which thus increasingly loses its importance. Amongst the Thongas this has not yet taken place, and their religious system seems to correspond to a very ancient state of things ; it is in all probability the pure form of primitive Ancestrolatry.

b) The Thonga Conception of the Offerings.

782 With the help of new information obtained since writing the
778 first edition of this book, I think it now possible to attain to a fuller
789 understanding of the meaning of this great Thonga word *mhamba* which I have translated either by offering or by sacrifice, in connection with the killing of a victim. Under this designation come objects of two distinct categories : articles of food, clothing, etc. which are of immediate service to human existence and which are *given* to the ancestor-gods, and magic or magico-religious objects which are not given but only employed in the act of worship. The aim is the same, whatever may be the nature of the object, viz. to obtain the favour and help of the ancestor-gods, but in the first case the officiant adresses himself to living, conscious

(1) There seems to be a profound difference between Thongas and Suthos on this point. The Rev. P. Ramseyer assured me on very good evidence that in Basutoland "a wife takes the family name (seboko) of her husband and abandons her *midimo*." The midimo, says my informant, are not only the *badimo* proper, i. e. the ancestor-gods, but all the supernatural powers in which a given clan trusts, the totem, the spirit (moea) of hail, of rain, of lightning, of disease. A Sutho woman can become a Tebele by marriage, though this seldom actually happens.

On my return from the battle I showed all the army how I had prayed." The old general's spontaneous appeal to the gods on behalf of his country in its hour of supreme danger is indeed worthy of notice, and also furnishes a proof that ancestor-worship is still a living force and has not become a mere matter of ritual amongst those who practise it. This prayer of the Nkuna general, this exclamation of an anguished soul in the presence of a great danger, may be regarded as *verbal magic*, as it is *not* expressedly addressed to the gods, and the same may be said of the formula employed to cancel an oath in the offering of reconciliation, the mention of the gods being absent in this case also. All these acts, however, are mhamba. They are in reality accomplished with the idea that the gods hear and see what is said and done and will be induced to deliver their worshippers.

The magic character of these rites is most marked in the cases of communionist magic ; those which are classed under imitative magic may perhaps be more properly called *symbols*, or at least some of them (1).

Elias Libombo once came to me and said : "My brother, Klass, died. He was *the mhamba of the Libombos*. Now his younger

(1) But what is a *symbol* in religion, and what is the difference between the symbol and the magic rite? I cannot treat this important subject here in all the necessary detail and length. Let us take only one instance. The offering of incense which took place every evening in the Temple of Jerusalem, and which is also widespread in certain branches of the Christian Church is regarded as a symbol. The perfumed smoke which ascends towards heaven corresponds to the prayers of the worshippers, which are thought of as ascending to God and pleasing Him, just as the agreeable smell of incense gratifies the nostrils of the man who perceives it. But in the Hebrew religion it is not thought that incense conveys prayers to God in some actual and magical fashion. It is a symbol. Psychologically speaking this use of incense is probably to be explained in the following manner: The material representation of a religious act (or a religious truth) tends to induce in the worshipper a stronger faith in the efficacy of the act or the reality of the truth. His soul thus finds satisfaction in the performance of the symbolic act through which he feels himself brought into closer communion with his God. It is easy to understand that in the course of the religious evolution, a higher conception of God should have caused the magic act to evolve into the symbol, and that the symbol itself should be abandoned or reduced to a minimum when the idea of God has become perfectly spiritualised and communion with the Father who is in Heaven is realized without any external and intermediary means. A comparison of the great mhamba with the relics of saints or other relics used in certain religions would probably show a similar type of evolution.

Some scientists believe that religious evolution contained a *preanimistic phase*, in which the worship of spirits had not yet come into existence, and in which primitive man employed only magic means to influence the supernatural powers. This

787 brother will be so called." Nkolele, the father of these two men,
793 was the Libombo mhamba before them. This is another meaning of this great word mhamba. Klass was neither a gift made to the ancestor-gods of the Libombos, nor a magic object employed to win their favour, but he was the elder member of the family, the one who was the official and indispensable intermediary between all the Libombos and their gods. For this reason he was a mhamba. This leads me to propose the following definition of the word : *A mhamba is any object or act or even person which is used to establish a bond between the gods and their worshippers.*

Having thus analysed all the elements contained in the Thonga mhamba, we may safely conclude that its spiritual and religious value cannot be denied. Whatever place ritual may hold in the ceremonies of ancestrolatry, whatever mixture of devotional and magic elements may be found in them, the offering is not a mere external gift which appeases the gods by its material value, nor a simple means of coercion which forces them to submit to the will of the worshipper. By means of the mhamba the Thonga really aims at entering into relationship with those powerful spirits who control his life (1).

may be true, but as regards Bantus, they have long outgrown this stage. Even when they have recourse to magic processes in order to influence their ancestor-gods, these have a distinctive character, different from that of the ordinary magic which they practise when they wish to affect the impersonal forces of Nature. Everything done in order to obtain the favour of the ancestor-gods is a *mhamba*, not a *muri*, as I have already pointed out.

782 (1) Religious and magic practices are more or less mingled in Thonga ritual and it
789 is evident that the smaller the degree of magic contained in a rite, the more genuine religious feeling there will be in it. I owe to my Venda informant the description of
755 a sacrifice performed in his tribe for a sick child, where the two elements are combined to an extraordinary extent. It is called *the offering of the goat with clothes* (mbudzi ya u dzwindisa).

A goat is provided. It is placed before a basin of water mixed with certain drugs and forced to drink, to drink till it is fully distended, and dies. It is then skinned and cut open. The large intestine is extracted from the body, and a part of it is cut off and stitched up at one end so as to form a kind of pouch. From each limb a bit of meat is taken, and a provision of the seeds of various cereals, brought to the spot together with drugs. All these different kinds of food are introduced into the pouch, the process of filling it being accompanied by prayers to the ancestor-god. The officiant, whilst proceeding with his task, puts seeds into the goat's intestine with one hand, and, with the other, takes other seeds and places them apart. These he will keep carefully in order to sow them later on. And continually he prays: "Eat your fill and be satisfied, and leave us some for our use." Thus the ancestor-god has been fed, well and duly stuffed. The pouch is then stitched at its other end. But now the ancestor-god must be clothed